



CHRISTIANITY AND JAINISM

An Interfaith Dialogue

Padmanabh S. Jaini



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Professor Padmanabh S. Jaini
in conversation with
Sir Mark Tully

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The Withdrawing Soul

‘Certain attainments (labdhi), involving increased purity, are said to provide a necessary transition from the moment of turning from bondage to the flash of samyak-darshana [having the correct view, in which the soul for the first time glimpses its true nature]. First and most important of these is kshayopashama-labdhi, in which large numbers of obscuring karmas are forced to dissociate themselves from the soul while others are placed under temporary suppression. The increased energy and knowledge thus made available allows the soul to progress quickly in the search for its own nature. It withdraws attention from the possessions, body, and psychological states with which it had formerly identified itself; gaining thereby a certain distance or detachment from passions, it attains the pure and peaceful state called vishuddhi.

* * *

Consciousness attuned only to actions or the results of actions generates perpetual continuation of the samsaric cycle. Upon the attainment of samyak-darshana, the soul turns away from such concerns; it undergoes a deliberate and mindful reorientation of attention, coming to focus upon nothing but its own nature (svabhava). The body, the possessions, even the ever-changing psychological states (anger, the passions, pride, self-pity, and so forth), are no longer identified with the self. The functioning of consciousness is now characterized as jnana-cetana. There, the individual dwells only upon the innate and pure qualities of the soul, realizing that he is not doing anything

in the world beyond simply knowing it. Finally, his awareness of objects no longer generates a tendency to grasp or manipulate them; he remains in the state called antaratman, seeing the self within, thereby greatly increasing his mindfulness and pure awareness.

This highly developed jnana-cetana will enable him to undertake the pure conduct (samyak-caritra) necessary to overcome ingrained negative tendencies, tendencies which have persisted from beginningless time. Thus he will attain eventually the state of constant self-awareness and purity called paramatman, the highest (the liberated) self."

— Padmanabh S. Jaini

The Jaina Path of Purification

ABSTINENCE

Aparigraha, limits to having, gets absolutely to the heart of the dilemma which we face today. So many of our environmental problems, so much of the unhappiness in the prosperous parts of the world, are all caused indeed by wanting to have too much. And at the heart of our economics there is this thing called consumerism, encouraging people to believe that having is the way to happiness and that greed is a virtue rather than an evil. Therefore, to me, Aparigraha - or any discipline which leads us to some form of restraint over demanding things - that surely is crucial.

There are two contradictory trends running in our times: on the one hand, people are revolting against religious rituals, while on the other, there is a desire for 'spirituality'. One reason for this, I think, is reaction against this insistence that life is all about demanding more and having more. We know that this leads to an inner emptiness and a barrenness. What makes people fall prey to this syndrome? Some would put this down to fear, a fear of not having enough, and that fear itself creates barrenness. I would agree with them in part, but I would also say that it is quite simply the worshipping of false gods, which all religions have warned us against. The gods, in fact, are our possessions and these possessions are things which can never satisfy. Greed is known to be something which is never satisfied and consequently, the lack of satisfaction leads to an inner emptiness. Where do we look, then, for our sense of being who we really are?

— Mark Tully

Sir Mark Tully, KBE (born 24 October, 1935 in Calcutta) was the Chief of Bureau, BBC, New Delhi for 22 years. He is a regular presenter of the BBC Radio 4 programme 'Something Understood', which has themes and music on religion, spirituality and the human condition.

ABSTINENCE

Abstain, limit, to having, get absolutely to the point of the dilemma which we face today. So many of our environmental problems, so much of the unhappiness in the various parts of the world, are all caused indirectly by wanting to have too much. And at the heart of our consuming there is this thing called consumerism. Encouraging people to believe that having is the way to happiness and that greed is a virtue rather than an evil. Therefore, to me, Abstinence is any discipline which leads us to some form of restraint. Over-consuming things - that surely is crucial.

These are the contradictory trends running in our times: on the one hand, people are revolting against religious rituals, while on the other, there's a desire for spirituality. One reason for this, I think, is reaction against the insistence that life is all about demanding more and having more. We know that this leads to an inner emptiness and a barrenness. What makes people fall prey to this syndrome? Some would put this down to fear, a fear of not having enough, and that fear itself creates barrenness. I would agree with them in part, but I would also say that it is a deeper, slyer, the worshiping of false gods, which all religions have warned us against. The gods, in fact, are our possessions and these possessions are things which can never satisfy. Greed always leads to be something which is never satisfied and consequently the lack of satisfaction leads to an inner emptiness. When do we look, then, for our sense of being who we really are? - Mary Ellen

Sir Mary Lily, KBE (born 24 October 1927 in London, died 1991) of Bangor, NHC, New Delhi for 25 years. He was the BHC Radio 4 programme 'Society and Religion' and the BBC's 'The World on Religion'.

Searching Across Traditions

**Padmanabh S. Jaini in conversation
with Mark Tully***

Mark Tully: The vows of Jainism are meant to clear a path to the soul's search for its true nature. I would like to start with the "Search". How do you see the ultimate goal? Buddhism and Jainism have been described as atheistic religions, and yet you say you do believe in salvation. How do you combine these two things ?

Padmanabh S. Jaini: The object of 'search' for a spiritually oriented Jain is his true identity. The body obviously could not be the self because it perishes. And if you do not believe - as Christianity and some other religions do - in a single life-span of existence for the soul on earth, followed by eternal heaven or hell, and if you believe in the reincarnation of the soul as all Indian religions do, then you must define yourself by asking such questions as "Who am I, how do I come to have this body, and what could be my relation with

* This conversation is based on one of the early editions of Sir Mark Tully's acclaimed series of programmes, *Something Understood*, broadcast by BBC radio. We are grateful to Unique Broadcasting Company for permission to use the text of his interview with Professor Padmanabh S. Jaini, in February 1995. Professor Jaini was then on his way back from the Vatican after the First Interfaith Dialogue between Catholicism and Jainism sponsored by Institute of Jainology, U.K.. Our thanks to Sir Mark Tully for amplifying many of the issues which have an even sharper relevance in today's world.

ed. Sima Sharma

other fellow beings who are also caught up in this cycle of rebirth." The Jains (and the Buddhists) deny any role for a 'Creator God' either in the creation or in the salvation of souls. They believe that the souls have existed from beginningless times in the state of embodiment and will continue till eternity in that state, unless a way can be found to break this cycle. Instead of relying on a single eternally free Divinity for this salvation, the Jains have a system in which there is a beginningless (and endless) line of Teachers called Jinas (Spiritual Victors), humans like us, who have attained salvation (i.e. freedom from embodiment and hence perfection) with the aid of the teachings of the previous Jinas, and are now able to show the same path to others. To put it simply, instead of a single God, the Jains have a series of Teachers. Instead of bondage alone, there is bondage plus a possibility of salvation. The autonomy of the soul is always maintained, which gives it the choice of bondage or salvation. You can say that a Jain is a person who chooses the path of salvation as shown by the Jinas.

MT: You speak of bondage and salvation. What exactly do you mean by bondage?

PSJ: The Jains understand it as the binding of the soul with the non-soul. The non-soul is matter, characterized by a certain touch, taste, smell, and colour, which in its gross form is the body and the physical apparatus of the senses and the mind. These are supported and fashioned by a certain subtle and invisible matter, capable of turning into karma, and hence called the karmic matter. The Jains are distinguished from other Indian religions by their doctrine that this mass of inanimate karmic matter pervades the whole universe. In a process which has no

beginning in time, this subtle matter is automatically attracted to the soul when the latter, ignorant of its true nature, is charged with passions like attachment and aversion. Thus bound, it obstructs the qualities of the soul such as knowledge, purity and bliss, just as fine dust floating around might settle on the wet surface of a mirror and block its capacity to reflect objects.

MT: To get rid of those passions then, you need to follow the teaching of great teachers of the Jain religion?

PSJ: Yes. Indeed the entire teaching can be summed up by one Sanskrit word “samvara”, i.e. stopping of the influx. The influx of the karmic matter is going on continuously, and it must result in bondage. The Jains believe that it is possible to stop this influx, because aspiration for emancipation (moksha) is innate to the soul. The soul’s ability to seek the true nature of its self and to overcome the passions is never totally destroyed by the mass of karma that surrounds it. This innate power of the soul can be developed fully by renouncing attachment to worldly possessions as well as to the passions, in short by following the ascetic path of the Jinas. Aparigraha, among the five great vows of Jainism, helps one first, to shed “external possessions” which leads on to the detachment of non-possessiveness.

MT: There are many people in the West who feel, in some ways, that religions like Christianity have failed and they look towards the religions of India, like Jainism and Buddhism and indeed certain aspects of Hinduism, for a completely different view and a different way to search for God. You seem to think that there is much that is common in all religions. What are the fundamental differences between the Indian and other religions in the search after God?

PSJ: This is a very broad question and speaking for Jainism, I can only say that there are certain basic values - respect for life, for example, which distinguishes it. Jains, as is well known, don't have a holy cow. They don't worship animals. They don't dip in the Ganges. And yet, all life - both human, animal and even the elements of "nature" (i.e. earth, water, fire and air) - is 'sacred', in the sense that they may not be violated. This respect for life, so much emphasized in Jainism but present in all Indian religions, can become the starting point in our search for the new ethics of ecology.

MT: Is this the specific contribution of Indian religion?

PSJ: I would say so. The Bible tells us that the universe was created for man's dominion and that animals were created as food for humans. Wealth and worldly power are seen as proof of God's grace. If this is true, then what is there to prevent us from excessive exploitation, which must create a civilization based on consumerism and supermarkets? Jainism and other Indian religions, throughout the ages, have been asking us to minimize our needs and to turn inward, towards our souls, for true happiness. Of course, the idea of renunciation is not altogether absent in other world religions. And there is a common ground here on which to build a new society.

MT: You live in a country, which is the arch promoter of consumerism, which is America. How do you feel about that which goes against that basic asceticism - of not buying rather than buying?

PSJ: Well, I must say that it is very alienating. We already see the danger that has overtaken our civilization in cities like Los Angeles and even smaller places, like my university

town of Berkeley. Huge supermarkets are rising, together with violence and unrest. Families are falling apart, and even schoolboys are taking guns to their schools. Life is not safe even at home: families live behind closed doors guarded by alarm systems. Nevertheless, I believe that the North Americans, with their puritanical past and strong ethnic sub-cultures, have within them the ability to realise the futility of such excessive accumulation in the pursuit of happiness.

MT: I live in India and I see with great sadness that India, at least through its middle classes, is being swept, by exactly the same consumerism that has dominated the West. This is truly a matter for sadness and, as you and I agree, utterly alien to the Indian spirit. The Indian understanding in particular has always held that material possessions are in a way dangerous. Certainly, reliance on material possessions is very dangerous. That is the Indian spirit of asceticism. There is also the Indian spirit of pursuing the middle road, or not allowing anything to dominate your life. That was the understanding, of course, of Mahatma Gandhi, when he said that there is enough for everyone's needs but not for everyone's greed, and that we cannot have a balanced world unless people pursue their needs rather than their greed. But what is happening today is quite the contrary.

PSJ: Well, there is something fatalistic about it. I recall the astute observation made by a European thinker that the "fate of the world is to be Americanized." You cannot help it. This consumerism will probably continue to grow for a long while in India. But I believe that the Indian genius - which produced Mahatma Gandhi in our times - will find a way to turn away from this craze. There is no doubt,

however, that the poor in India will first need to come out of their present level of deprivation before they see the perils of consumerism of the West. Only then will there be a true test of the spirit's power to choose the ascetic path.

MT: But these teachings of the great Jain teachers about such an ascetic path, does seem very extreme. I think it is very hard, especially in the present age, for people to follow them. There doesn't seem to be the concept of Grace or help from God or anything like that in Jainism. How do you get over that?

PSJ: Indeed it is hard to follow the ascetic path. But the Jains have also laid out an easier path for the lay people, which is not yet widely known. Let me mention here a recent book called *Jaina Yoga* by R. Williams, an Oxford University publication (1963). Here the author has laid out an elaborate chart of the progressive stages through which a lay person practices samvara. It leads to the ascetic life only towards the end of an active life as a householder. But even without following a formal discipline, most Jains may be said to follow the minimum required of them: as for example, their practice of vegetarianism. Given the fact that human beings are not vegetarians by birth (as cows and sheep are), it could be said that the Jains have made a moral choice by adhering to a vegetarian diet out of kindness to animals because of the belief that they too have souls. It is possible, for ordinary people also, to train their inclinations and their nature. The moral choice is not easy but it is not impossible.

MT: But you don't seem to have any help on that path. On any ascetic path people will slip up sometimes. In Christianity, for instance, we have the concept of forgiveness and God's grace. You do not have that in Jainism.

PSJ: Well, the Jains understand forgiveness in a different way. The karma that you have bound through willful actions must mature and give its result (say, as pain or pleasure) and then, like a ripe fruit falling from a tree, it must depart from the soul. This law of consequence is inexorable, it cannot simply be wished away. Accordingly the Jains believe that karma cannot be forgiven by an external agency. The only way to remove the karmic burden forever, is by knowing the true nature of reality, that is, the self and the not-self, in short the nature of the soul, its bondage, and salvation. And this knowledge is made possible by the grace of the teaching of the Jina. He has attained his own salvation but teaches the path to others out of selflessness - this itself is seen as Grace. No doubt, there is a bit of magic attached to the idea of Grace in theistic religions: getting relief free from an omnipotent Father, capable of forgiving as well as punishing the soul. But even there, the soul will probably be endowed with the knowledge of the self and thus freed from sins.

MT: This seems to slightly misrepresent the Christian concept of Grace. To me, Grace is an acknowledgement that we are in some ways, incomplete. We cannot do everything for ourselves and therefore we are dependent on God. I feel that this is tremendously important, especially in these days when there is so much emphasis on people achieving, achieving, competing, competing! We all need to be reminded that we are incomplete and to my mind, the concept Grace is a comforting one because it allows one to acknowledge one's incompleteness and to rely to some extent on some other power for help, quite simply.

However, to move on: your religion is a small religion in

total terms and less than one percent even in the country of its origin, but an important one percent. Other religions are concerned about expanding more and more. Muslims and Christians think more people should become Muslims or Christians, because they believe that Islam or the Christian way is the right way to look for God. It seems to me that Jainism is remarkably content to be a small, but important religion.

PSJ: The Jain community is indeed small and it is true that Jains do not engage in activities of conversion just to increase their numbers. In this the Jains, in common with Hindus, share a belief that one should let all beings mature in their own way. What the Jains would want to do is to help non-Jains realise their own potentials in matters spiritual. Conversion is probably not the right way for this, for the Jains are content even when there is only a partial acceptance of their creed, such as of ahimsa, by a non-Jain. Take for example the case of the Mughal Emperor, Akbar, who decreed that there should be no killing of animals (amari) in his realm on certain days holy to the Jains, and who even chose to be a vegetarian occasionally. (Indeed his son Jahangir, because of his addiction to hunting, used to frown upon Jains for making him uncomfortable and is reported to have even banished Jain merchants from his capital city of Agra.) Of course, Akbar did not give up his Islamic faith, but the Jains were gratified that they had persuaded a non-believer Emperor to respect the life of animals and who, to that extent, had embraced a basic tenet of Jainism.

Probably such a non-absolutist attitude can be traced to the most ancient Jain doctrine of *anekanta* or multifacetedness, which admits the possibility that reality

can be viewed differently by different persons from a variety of angles. This provides the Jain with an incentive for critical inquiry into the teachings of others and which may lead, regardless of differences, to a peaceful co-existence.

MT: Your concept that there is goodness in all religions, is one that goes against the element of zeal in religions. For example, the Catholic Church believes it is the one true Church and the ultimate moral good is to make the whole world Catholic.

PSJ: I do not believe that interfaith dialogue begins with the assumption of equality among the faiths. As a matter of fact, equality has never been admitted by any religion, including Jainism. The Jains view different faiths as so many steps on a ladder (no doubt, themselves on the highest rung), which still provides room for respect for each others' spiritual quest, a prerequisite for any dialogue.

MT: Mahatma Gandhi, who of course was deeply influenced by Jainism himself, once said to a Christian woman who wanted to become a Hindu, "Look, you must become a better Christian because that was what you were born as." Do you accept that too as a part of Jainism: that the religion you are born to is probably the natural religion through which you should seek the meaning of life and salvation?

PSJ: I doubt if Mahatma Gandhi had a particular sect in mind when he said, "You should become a better Christian." He uses the word Christianity not in the sectarian sense in which it is employed by the Catholic Church or the Church of England. Mahatma Gandhi's Christianity is based on the Sermon on the Mount, a text

which he can equate with a portion of the Bhagavad-Gita. For him such designations, as Christian or Hindu, point to a spiritually oriented person engaged in the service of the poor, and in that sense he probably saw himself as a good Christian and a true Hindu as well. I believe the Jains can agree with this broad view, since their religion does not seek salvation through devotion to a particular Deity or a Teacher (not even a particular Jina), but only through the true understanding of the nature of the self.

MT: I now want to talk a little about asceticism, aparigraha, because it is so important for you. I remember, when years ago, I was studying classics, one thing we were always taught was the great theme of Greek tragedy: "nothing in excess." It often seems to me that the sort of asceticism practiced by the Jains is excessive, it goes too far in that direction, it is life denying, it is almost cruelty to yourself.

PSJ: It may appear so and probably there is some truth in what you say in comparison. Asceticism has a long history in India and can be traced to even a thousand years before the advent of Mahavira, the Jain Teacher, and Gautama the Buddha, around 500 B.C. What distinguished these two ascetic figures is that they renounced their household life while still in the prime of their youth. Moreover, they were able to attract thousands of affluent young men and women to follow their example, disregarding the duties to their family, their community, and to their King, or as we might say, to their country. But in doing this they also gave birth to a new society which not only accepted these renunciants, but even considered it meritorious to support these homeless people with food and shelter. Evidently, such a society was not driven only by self-interest and greed.

MT: This certainly is a value cherished in most traditions. What makes the Jain tradition distinctive in the practice of such, what we may call, charity?

PSJ: The Jain chronicles claim that at the time of the death of Mahavira (traditionally in 527 B.C) his congregation consisted of 14,000 monks and 36,000 nuns. Today in a population of some six million, there are about 2,000 monks and over 5,000 nuns. It should be noted that these ascetic orders returned their gift tenfold by teaching about the holy path and in many cases were the only centres of literacy outside of the Brahmanical school system. While there probably are over a hundred thousand Buddhist (Theravada) monks at present in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia, their order of nuns has been extinct for more than a thousand years. In India proper, Buddhism, alas, has "disappeared" altogether. Hindus, who have countless male renunciants of innumerable denominations, do not permit their women to leave the household; even their widows must practice austerities within the protection of the family. The Jains are therefore distinguished by their treatment of women as equals of men, and their lay communities have looked after the nuns and monks with great care and devotion. The Jain ascetics have no home of their own; unlike the Christian mendicants, they must continuously be on the move, and subsist on the food provided freely by the Jain householders. It is true that their hardship appears to be too excessive to outsiders. But it should be remembered that in a population of some eight hundred million followers of Indian religions, the number of Jain mendicants is small indeed, and moreover their way of life should be seen as that of exemplars.

MT: When you talk about these exemplars I sometimes think may work the other way. The standard they set, the austerity which they practice, are so extreme that a certain person like myself may tend to think, "well this is absolutely impossible, this cannot be a way for me. I cannot do it". So it is a counter-example, in a sense.

PSJ: So do I, believe me. I also cannot practice it. But I see a great many Jain laymen and women practicing some of these austerities in their daily life. They have totally renounced the killing of animals and some even exclude a variety of vegetables from their diet. On holy days, entire families practice total fasting from sunrise to sunrise, sometimes extending it even to a week or more, while still engaged in the activities of daily life. The pressures of modern living will probably result in a shortage of monks and nuns even within India. In the western world, the migrant Jains, without daily contact with these exemplars, will most likely turn to a moderate form of asceticism. The severe asceticism which was possible in an economy and culture of the past may not be sustainable in our present day society that does not believe in handing out food, even to a holy mendicant.

MT: I have been to the Kumbha mela, for instance, and I have seen some extraordinary sights of sadhus who stood on one leg for five years. Would you agree that it is possible to be over-ascetic?

PSJ: Yes indeed, and the Jains have openly condemned all such practices. I have lived in Varanasi myself and have seen some of these practices but none of this is permitted to the Jain ascetics. If you visit a Jain temple you will see the images of the Jinas presented in only two postures. They are either seated in the so-called lotus posture or

standing erect, in deep meditation. They do not even raise their hand in a gesture of blessing or of preaching, and unlike the Buddha, they are also never shown in a reclining position. Neither the Jain mendicants nor the lay people have traditionally indulged in any of the practices exhibited at the Kumbha mela. Here, I recall the famous sermon of the Buddha on the "Middle Path." He had rejected the very same mortifications but they have unfortunately survived among the ascetics of a wide variety of yogic traditions of India.

MT: The Middle Path is a very important concept. I think it is important to realize that there have been advocates of the Middle Path in the Western tradition as well, going right back to Greek tragedy, where one of the major themes was "nothing in excess". There has also been a very rich tradition of asceticism in the Christian tradition. After all, there is the story of the rich young man who came to Jesus and said, "What should I do to be saved?" Jesus said, "Go away and sell all that you own". There still are very very strong traditions of asceticism in the Christians monastic traditions.

However, it seems to me the Middle Path is important in itself, because if we demand too much asceticism of people or ourselves, we can damage ourselves or damage other people. We could place unfair demands on ourselves or damage other people by saying to them "unless you meet these very stringent standards of asceticism, you are not pursuing the path to moksha or salvation". And therefore, again we come to the middle road, don't we? It says that even a thing like asceticism has to be kept in balance with the other needs of life, the needs of love, of bringing up your children, and indeed having a reasonable expectation

of fulfilling your needs as well. You should not be too ascetic and certainly not be un-ascetic!

PSJ: I agree with you. But the real question is where do we draw the line? Asceticism varies from one country and one culture to another. In a country like England, where one expects snow in winter, even a holy man would not go barefoot, or live without warm clothes. You have lived in India where it is hot and it is possible to survive without these and go about without any means of transport. The Jains abroad will also gradually modify their practices to suit the climatic conditions and to conform to the legal restrictions on certain severe forms of asceticism.

MT: I want to come back to the question of consumerism. There are certain professions which are barred to Jains, because those have to do with taking life in some way or the other. However, one profession which Jains do very obviously practice with enormous success is commerce and business. But it seems to me that commerce and business is all about money, acquiring things and consumerism. These are just the sort of things which would be opposed to your doctrine of renunciation. So how is it that it is right for Jains?

PSJ: Well, this is a question often raised by many sociologists, and a point which the Jains themselves are unable to explain to others. I believe that the Jains see in commerce and business far less occasion for committing violence, in contrast to warfare, military service or farming. But even in business, they are not permitted to sell arms or poisonous chemicals, or deal in animal parts such as skins and bones. So historically, they dealt in such commodities as cloth, grains, metals, precious stones and the like. No wonder even to this day they are considered

prominent among cloth merchants and jewellers, and are dominant in banking and the stock market. Now coming to the profit side, it is true, as you point out that this is indeed accumulation, and the Jains too perceive it as possessions (parigraha), which they are admonished endlessly by their ascetic teachers to relinquish in a ritualistic way, by formally taking the vow of limiting one's acquisitions.

As regards the profits - an inevitable outcome of skillful enterprise, honesty, and hard work - the Jains may be compared to the Quakers in the West. Both generate a lot of wealth, but do not necessarily spend it on themselves, i.e. they are not consumers. The large surplus is then spent on promoting cultural institutions like temples and libraries, and on philanthropic activities, notably for the care of animals and hospices and so forth. It can be said to their credit that they have not allowed their affluence to weaken their habits of vegetarian diet and the limited ascetic practices mentioned earlier. Earning wealth through legitimate means (nyayopatta-dhana) is not forbidden to any Jain layperson. It is firmly held that if a person has an impulse to give up the household life, he/she should be enabled to do so without delay, and renunciation of a large fortune on such an occasion is seen as highly meritorious, a further proof of the sincerity and noble disposition of the renunciant.

MT: You talked about holy men as being exemplars and teachers. But is there also an emotional content in their appeal to the people? Do people love them and follow them because they have such a deep emotional commitment to them?

PSJ: If you are asking about the emotional connection

between a teacher and a Jain layperson comparable to that of a guru and a devotee elsewhere in India, I would have to say that this aspect is conspicuously absent in Jainism. This is a religion which essentially asks you to realise your own nature by yourself. The Jain ascetics are instruments to awaken others, but beyond that there is no emotional sustenance, sometimes called grace (prasada) by other Indians, which they can dispense freely to others.

MT: Do you feel there is a danger in that sort of relationship? Enormous numbers of people, for instance, felt emotionally committed to Mahatma Gandhi. As you rightly say, in Hinduism people are tremendously committed to their gurus. Do you think that there is danger in it? Does Jainism teach you that?

PSJ: Well, the Jains see danger in any form of attachment. The Jain teachers never tire of telling their audience that knowledge can be imparted to anyone, but that conduct cannot be given, it must rise within one's self. What you say about Gandhiji is quite true but I doubt if he ever claimed the status of a spiritual guru.

MT: But there is also an element of inspiration. It's not the same thing as an example. It is something which is emotional. I remember when I was struggling with Christianity, not making much of a success with it, one of the things that kept me going was the inspiration I received from some clergymen - priests of the Church of England. In a way, that inspiration really went even beyond admiration, it verged on love. And that was profoundly important to me. When I look back now, over a long and very irregular life, I am aware that, never quite gave up the search. I realise how much I owe to these people who inspired me in those early days.

I think this love is, in a sense, the love of beauty, love of goodness - basically a love of qualities. It is the love which some Christians can feel deeply in a personal relationship with Jesus - though I have never achieved that sort of relationship. It is the love which I saw when I was in Ayodhya, for instance. I found there a wonderful man who had dedicated his life to Rama, who had given up all his property, and there had been plenty of it, and everything else, to live and work for Rama. When you speak to him about Rama there is an utter devotion that comes across. It is that sort of love which one can feel, in a lesser way, for the people who are really good. I suppose, in a funny way, I love Gandhi - because I have learnt so much from what is good and beautiful in him and his teachings.

PSJ: That indeed is there and I have known Jain monks and nuns who do inspire in their disciples tremendous adoration and devotion. This does occasionally develop into a kind of an emotional attachment directed to that individual rather than to the congregation of mendicants. But the scriptures openly warn against such emotional bonds, pointing to the example of Indrabhuti Gautama, the chief mendicant disciple of Mahavira, whose attachment to his master was a major hindrance to his own salvation. The Jain gurus are to be revered and supported, and lastly to be listened to. Indeed a Jain word for a layman is shravaka, one who listens. I would therefore say that in Jainism there is a lack of approval for that kind of emotional bond which is carefully forged and admired among theistic religions; this may be the consequence of not believing in a personal God as your saviour.

MT: We were talking before about prayer. There is no God for you to pray to, yet prayer is such an essential part of

most religions. So how do you cope with this problem?"

PSJ: The word prayer does not describe correctly what the Jains actually do when they 'pray.' The Jain word is stava or stotra, which means praise or adoration of the Jina for his infinite knowledge, bliss, and purity, qualities which a Jain aspires to attain. The Jina is not a God, but a supreme Teacher. A lay person entering a Jain temple is therefore asked to set aside all desires for worldly objects, for the Jinas are past granting any wishes. They are exemplars, and a Jain is aspiring to follow their path of salvation, as a matter of fact, to become a Jina himself. An ancient Jain 'prayer' illustrates well what a Jain may legitimately seek from the Jina:

dukkhakkhao kammakkhao, samahi-maranam ca bohilabho
cal mama hou jagada-bandhava, jinavara tava carana-
saranena/

Let there be end of suffering and end of karmas; May my death be attended by mindfulness, and may I attain enlightenment, O Brother of the Universe, Jina!

for I have taken refuge in you.

Surely, this is not so much a prayer as an aspiration to reach some day the same goal as achieved by the Jinas. Christians say prayers but they do not aspire to be Christ themselves, and the Hindu devotees, for the most part, seek union with their Lord. The concept of assimilation into a higher spirit is not acceptable to the Jains. A soul maintains autonomy at all times and all are equal when they reach the state of emancipation or salvation (moksha).

MT: You said that you did not pray for material wealth, for good luck, or for Grace either, because you do not need Grace. I understand not praying for material wealth and

good luck myself. I too have great difficulty with the concept of God's intercession: "please make me better; please make my mother better, please give us a better world." I have some difficulty with that sort of God. I think prayer is not so much to do with asking for things from God, but an attempt to set up a conversation between ourselves and God. That force we call God is, to an extent personalised and to that extent, is open to communication with us. It is a comforting presence.

But, equally, I have difficulty with someone who says "you don't need Grace". Because, I think, as I said earlier, it demonstrates a lack of humility, and I do think hubris or pride in human capabilities is one of the cardinal sins of the last century and of course in Christianity we do very much have this concept of humility. Sometimes I think we have it too much, when for instance we talk of 'humbling' ourselves before God. I am not sure humbling is a good word - but I think 'humility' has an ennobling quality to it. Humility is supremely illustrated for Christians in the Passion story where Jesus asked God to take away the pain which he was going to suffer but then turned and said, "Let your will be done." Submission to God in Christianity is an act of humility. Some people see prayer as way of surrender. I don't see it quite like that. I see it as something which is very difficult. I see it as a way of putting yourself in touch with God and listening to God, which is very different to surrender. In a way, it is the opposite of surrender. It is saying that despite all my inadequacies and everything, there is something about me which God wants to hear about, something about me which God is prepared to talk about.

And isn't Aparigraha also a way of humility? Because it is about "losing" the self and relying entirely on the other or

others? Is it not, in fact, too much reliance on the self which creates all that is opposite to humility?

PSJ: Well, let me correct it a little. I did say that the Jains will not pray for worldly things in front of the Jina's images. However, there are indeed celestial gods and goddesses, seen as the guardian spirits of the main shrine, whom the laity may propitiate for worldly needs. But the true strength of a Jain aspirant lies in his own self. There is a firm belief that each soul has a certain amount of this innate quality of strength, which when exerted with the knowledge of the self, enables it to overcome the bonds of passions. This inner strength of the soul is wasted or scattered away by association with external things. By cutting these bonds, even those with one's body, a person can detach oneself from all that is not-self and thus become a true ascetic.

MT: So much of what you say leaves one with an impression that Jainism is almost entirely concerned with the 'self'. And yet in other religions, what I think is most attractive is forgetting about yourself, that you yourself are a problem to yourself. As that lovely Christian phrase says, for instance, "Lord, I am restless until I rest in Thee." Now all that seems to be absent from Jainism?

PSJ: I think you are right to some extent. Yes, the Jain teachers are saying to their followers that they should take care of themselves, because by doing so, they have taken care of the world as well. When a person refrains from acts of hurting by the vow of ahimsa, he has saved other beings also from reacting in a hostile manner. He knows that he has full control only over his own thoughts and actions, and must find his peace in himself, for the source of pacification is not outside.

MT: Jainism, and you yourself, believe very strongly that there is a great strength of truth that runs through all religions. One such strength of truth to me is the common goal of the mystic. When you read mystic writings in Hinduism, in Islam, in Christianity, you find that they are seeking the same goal. But in Jainism mysticism seems to be missing.

PSJ: Well, the kind of mysticism you see in the above religions comes partly through the search for the Other, mainly the Divine, the Transcendent Being, with whom the mystic seeks union or a return in some form to the Creator. In Jainism, as I said earlier, there is no concept of a Higher Being, let alone any loss of individuality of a soul by merging in that Being. The human Teachers (Jinas) at the end of their lives have achieved total liberation (moksha) and are no longer available for any communication. But the Jains do recognize the kind of mysticism that arises when an aspirant, having first learnt the truth, reaches yogic states that are ineffable. As for instance, when the soul abides peacefully in itself and by itself, having transcended the distinctions of the knower, the known, and the act of knowing. Ancient poetical works such as the Samayasara-kalasha (Sanskrit) of Amritachandra, the Paramatma-prakasha (Apabhransha) of Joindu, the stavas or hymns (Hindi) of the mediaeval saint Anandaghana, and more recently, the highly inspired writings (Gujarati) of Shrimad Rajachandra (1868-1901) who was a friend and counsellor of Mahatma Gandhi, have kept alive this spiritual quest and for that reason these poets are revered as mystics by the Jains.

MT: It seems to me Jainism is a lonely path. You do not have the help of God or a concept of love of God. You do not have anything like that.

PSJ: Well in a way, it is true. Surely, if there is no belief in God, you must accept that there cannot be such things as love of God! Instead the Jains emphasize the concept of peacefulness (upashama) within and among themselves and with the world surrounding them. This they achieve by cultivating the thoughts of friendliness towards all beings (maitri), joy at the sight of the virtuous (pramoda), deep compassion towards those who are suffering (karuna) and equanimity (madhyastha-bhava) towards those with ill disposition. I believe that the love of God can also be channelled through these noble attitudes, as is indeed done by the Buddhists and the followers of the Yoga school.

MT: As a Jain, do you sometimes regret that the more loving aspect of God, is not there in Jainism, or do you think it is something which hinders other religions?

PSJ: It would be too presumptuous of me to say that it hinders others. Probably it does not. It might even help. There is some truth in your observation that this element of nurture is lacking in Jainism and might adversely affect its spiritual core. But ultimately, if you do not admit to a Supreme Being who creates and controls your spiritual progress, then the only thing left is to grasp that which is wholly pure within you.

The Jains view the bound soul like a piece of gold lying deep within the ore. That piece of gold has always been there. It has not been placed there by any person. It can be removed from the ore, and by applying the right cleanser it can be purified, never to become impure again.

Similarly, the soul in its beginningless bondage has the potential of being freed through right means. So there is a beginning for the freedom of the soul and a process, namely

the path of samvara, for its purification. Having said that, it can be admitted that the emotional warmth which nurtures a devotee in say, Hinduism, is missing in Jainism, most likely at the level of a householder. The modern-day Jains do indeed fulfill this need by drawing sustenance from the culturally rich traditions of Indian saints, notably Mirabai, Kabir, Tyagaraj, Vivekananda, Tagore, and Gandhi, without necessarily accepting their theological assumptions.

MT: Could you describe what is to you the ultimate aim? What would you have achieved when you are absolutely 'holy', if I may use that word?

PSJ: The ultimate aim of a Jain is of course to be like a Jina! When the bonds of passions have been destroyed (vita-raga) the soul attains perfection of knowledge or Omniscience, an attribute of God in other religions. But such a soul, in Jainism, is neither Omnipresent nor Omnipotent, for these concepts are relevant only if there is a belief in a Creator God. For the Omniscient soul, at the end of the normal life span, there takes place a total and permanent separation of the body and the soul, a state which, if I may add, cannot even be contemplated in Christianity or Islam. The soul at this final Stage of salvation (moksha) is called Perfected (siddha), and it abides for ever in omniscient glory at the summit of the universe. Jains regard such souls as the most holy and blissful (mangala) and worship them and revere the mendicant teachers who follow the path.

MT: Have you found, in your own experience, that there is something about certain 'holy people', which you have recognized very quickly?

PSJ: That, I am afraid, is not easy to do. I doubt if you can recognize holiness; you certainly can recognize goodness, kindness, and gentleness. Holiness is probably defined by each religion in a different way. The Jains do recognize in their own teachers a certain holiness, which they fail to find in saints of other religions. I would say I have been fortunate to have been close enough to a few Jain teachers whom I have recognized as superior to others because of their holiness, but what exactly I saw in them is hard to define.

MT: Can you convey briefly a teaching you received from one of your Jain teachers?

PSJ: With pleasure. I remember a Sanskrit verse which he often quoted to illustrate the right way to live as a Jain:

Akritva para-santapam, agatva khala-namratam
Anukritya satam vartma, yad alpam api tad bahu/

Without hurting others,
Without submitting to the wicked,
Following the path of the good people,
Even if a little, whatever is achieved, that is plenty.

MT: Thank you.

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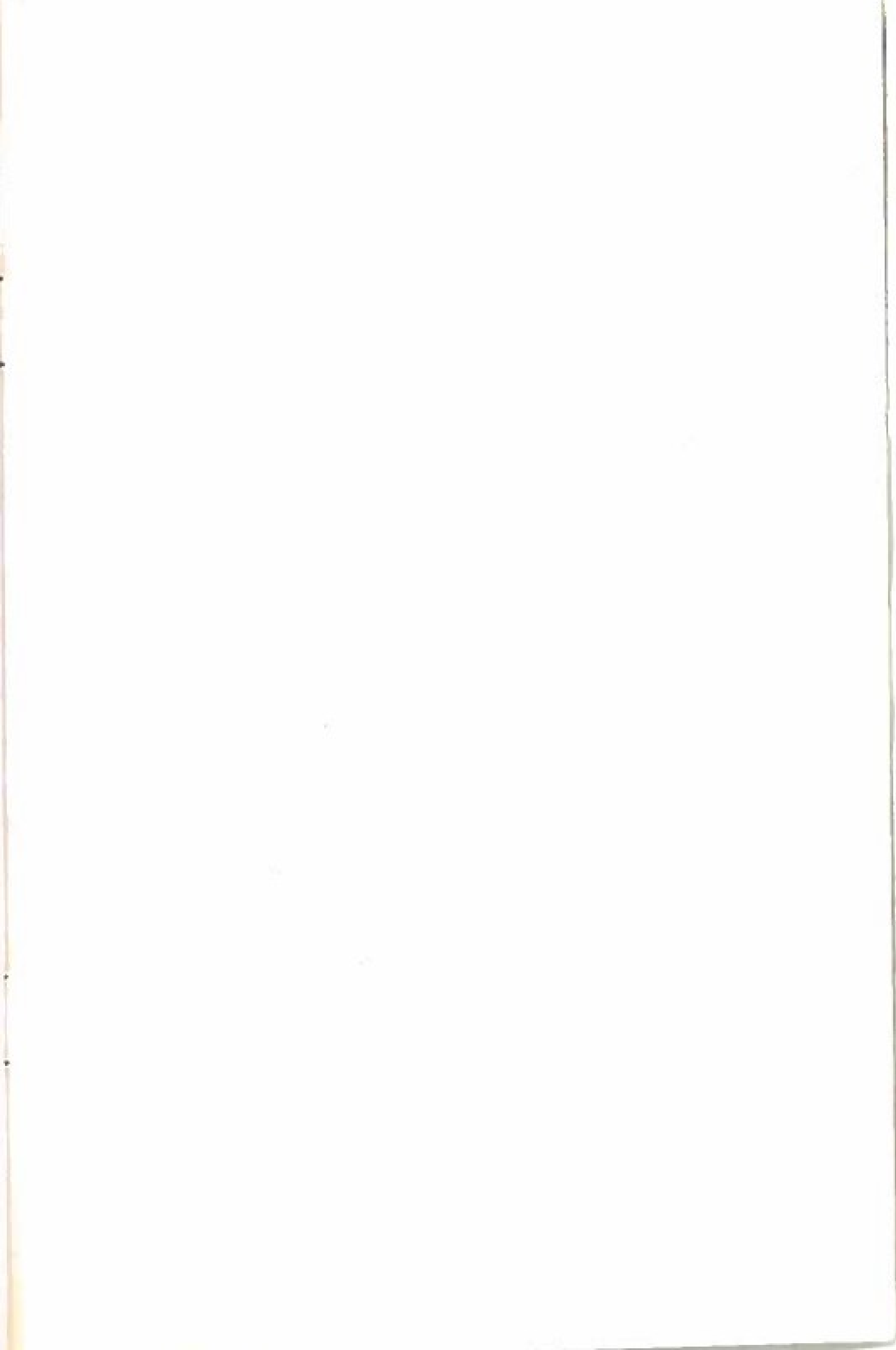
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